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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT CHEN'S OVERSEAS TRIP, CAMPAIGN TO
OUST PRESIDENT CHEN, ARREST OF STRAITS TIMES REPORTER FOR SPYING

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage September 2-5 on moves to oust President Chen Shui-bian; Chen's trip to the South Pacific aboard Air Force One; and the renaming of Chiang Kai-shek International Airport. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a Central News Agency story on page four September 3 with a banner headline that read "Arms Procurements Must Be Passed, Political Situation Must Be Stable; For Taiwan-U.S. Relations, September and October Are Key." Several papers also carried a news story September 4 regarding a publication of the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, whose editorial criticized the Taiwan government for succumbing to the Taiwan Solidarity Union and sidelining important cross-strait issues, which would only "weaken Taiwan's competitiveness."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" slashed at President Chen's overseas trip aboard Air Force One, saying that the indifference shown by the United States towards Chen's transit "is in exact proportion to Chen's declining legitimacy." An editorial in the pro-status quo "China Times" commented on the campaign to oust President Chen, saying Taiwan faces the tough subject of how to deepen its democracy and rule of law and how to ensure people's freedom and equal rights. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said in the face of the movements to unseat President Chen, Chen is not the only one under pressure; instead, it is the DPP that has more to lose. In terms of China's verdict on a Straits Times journalist accused of spying for Taiwan, editorials in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" and the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" both said the verdict shows that the Chinese government under President Hu Jintao has no intention of opening the door to political reform, despite China's torrid pace of economic expansion.
End summary.

¶3. President Chen's Overseas Trip

"Air Force One: Showing Off to Palau, But Asking for Insults in Guam!"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/2):

"... But no matter how hard President Chen has tried to create an ambiance for his overseas visit, one can hardly sense any joy in current developments; all people could discern was the feeling of depression and decay. The United States' refusal to allow [Taiwan's] Air Force One to transit Guam was actually not unexpected. What is noteworthy, however, is the United States'

persistently cold and indifferent attitude when commenting on this issue.

"Chen traveled westbound in a rage in May to protest to Washington for not allowing him to transit the continental U.S., giving people the impression that he is uninhibited and mercurial. Such an attitude would only make the U.S. government treat him with more guarded prudence. Besides, after Chen returned from his odyssey, a series of scandals, including his son-in-law's being taken into custody, and his and his wife's involvement in the special state affairs expense account scandal and the false report of jewelry assets case, respectively, have done severe harm to his image as well as that of the ruling party. The indifference shown by the United States is in exact proportion to Chen's declining legitimacy. Did the United States need to speak courteously to a state leader who is being protested with contempt by a million of his people?

"Given Chen's personality, he would have announced that he would not transit Guam after having been turned down [by the U.S.], because a few hours' transit is tasteless for him. But the situation today is different from that in the past; Chen's personal reputation and position are all in a critical situation. How much is left to his own advantage that he can use to turn hostile to the United States except for simply gulping down Washington's indifference? ..."

14. Campaign to Oust President Chen

A) "Deepening Democracy Is Ultimate Concern of Anti-Graft Movements"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/3):

"... This round of movements to oust Bian and oppose corruption is directly aimed at President Chen Shui-bian. In other countries where democratic elections are held, even if the accused [leader] does not step down on his accord out of guilt or shame, he would at

least solidly reflect on himself and review his practices. But when we look at President Chen and how he confronted the public accusations and doubts, we saw that he not only failed to clarify the doubts but also adopted various approaches, such as dividing, attacking or making fun of [the accusers] - all the moves that would only help to highlight the legitimacy and necessity of the anti-graft appeals. ...

"... The main reason why such an embarrassing and displeasing scene happened in Taiwan was because over the past few decades, Taiwan has transformed from an authoritarian system to a democracy... without going through any revolution or blood-shed. But the corruption and degeneracy that appeared following the transfer of power have all the more underscored the fact that Taiwan's democratic transformation has yet to be completed. ... All these signs truthfully showed that Taiwan remains in an unfinished stage of its democratic transformation. As a result, how to deepen democracy and the rule of law as well as how to ensure freedom and equal rights is a tough subject and the ultimate concern of the one million anti-graft people. ..."

B) "The DPP Flounders over Shih"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/5):

"As the countdown begins for the month-long, round-the-clock sit-in rally led by former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) chairman Shih Ming-teh, it would seem that President Chen Shui-bian is not the only one under pressure. The DPP itself is struggling to defend itself against Shih's attacks and is hamstrung by internal divisions and bickering. The worst moment of the crisis for Chen ended when the opposition failed to recall him. No one was surprised by the failure of that attempt, since the pan-blue camp did not have enough legislative votes for the measure to succeed. The moment that Chen retained the support of the DPP, he was home free. Without that support, he would have faced a serious threat from the recall. ...

"It is the DPP that has more to lose. Ever since Chen declared that

he would hand over a degree of responsibility to the premier, the party has acted like a child in serious need of guidance. There seems to be no leadership - individually or collectively - in the party. At a time like this, the last thing that the party needs is an extension of the crisis to show how helpless it has become. ..."

15. Arrest of Straits Times Reporter for Spying

A) "PRC Ruling Shows View on Freedoms"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] wrote in an editorial (9/5):

"The decision by a state court in the People's Republic of China to sentence Ching Cheong, the Hong Kong-based correspondent for Singapore's Straits Times to five years in prison on charges of spying for Taiwan's quite naturally sparked fierce criticism and grave concern in Hong Kong's media circles. Taiwan's Mainland Affairs council also strongly rebuked China for the engineered verdict by its state-controlled 'justice system' as yet another example of the PRC's oppression of news freedom and freedom of expression. ... The case of Ching Cheong and other instances of suppression of news freedom and human rights have shown that the Chinese government under PRC State Chairman Hu Jintao has no intention whatsoever of opening the door for political reform despite China's torrid pace of economic expansion and the continuation - if in fits and starts - of reform of the economic system. ... Indeed, actions by the PRC authorities aimed at intensifying their control over civil society, such as Ching's arrest or the forceful passage of 'anti-subversion' legislation in Hong Kong, displays publicly their fear of the vibrant civil society being fostered by China's overheating economy. ..."

B) "Controversial Verdicts Damaging to China's Image"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] commented in an editorial (9/2):

"In barely a week, mainland China has handed down two verdicts of two Chinese-born journalists working for foreign newspapers - Zhao Yan of the New York Times and Ching Cheong of the Straits Times in Singapore. ... Whatever the facts, it doesn't help Beijing's image to arrest journalists on such dubious charges of espionage or leaking state secrets. Only dictators are afraid of journalists who report truths. Mainland China, which has made stunning progress in the economic field, has failed to do the same in the political area.

The jailing of the two journalists serves no interests of the mainland. It hurts the country's image as a modern, civilized

member of the international community."

YOUNG